

Message Text

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62

ACTION SCI-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 EA-11 ISO-00 ACDA-19 CIAE-00 INR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1884

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY TOKHO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USAEC GERMANTOWN

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, TECH, BMEP, AS, JA

SUBJ: MINISTER ANNOUNCES URANIUM ENRICHMENT
PLANT

REF: CANBERRA A-135, JUNE 12, 1973 (NOTAL)

CANBERRA A-122, MAY 22, 1973 (NOTAL)

1. MINERALS AND ENERGY MINISTER CONNOR ANNOUNCED TO PARLIAMENT OCTOBER 23 PLANS TO BUILD A LOCAL PLANT TO ENRICH AUSTRALIAN URANIUM. HE SAID HE WILL DISCUSS A JOINT GOA-GOJ FEASIBILITY STUDY OF A FACILITY "UTILIZING JAPANESE TECHNOLOGY AND FINANCE" WHEN HE VISITS TOKYO STARTING OCTOBER 27. CONNOER INDICATED THE PLANT WOULD BE OWNED BY THE GOA AND DEVOTE A LARGE PART OF ITS CAPACITY TO ENRICHING LOCAL URANIUM DESTINED FOR JAPAN. SPEAKING IN COURSE OF DEBATE ON OPPOSITION'S CENSURE MOTION AGAINST WHITLAM GOVERNMENT (REPORTED SEPTTEL), CONNOR ALSO AFFIRMED THAT URANIUM PROSPECTING LICENSES IN NORTHERN TERRITORY WILL BE RENEWED AND THAT GOA WILL HONOR TO THE LETTER URANIUM EXPORT CONTRACTS

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APPROVED BY PREVIOUS GOA. HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN

AUSTRALIAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION AND DISMISSED AS "ABSURD" OPPOSITION SUGGESTIONS THAT HE SEEKS TO NATIONALIZE THE URANIUM INDUSTRY.

2. EMBASSY COMMENT: ONCE AGAIN CONNOR HAS RAISED MORE QUESTIONS THAT HE ANSWERED. A JAPANESE EMBASSY OFFICER CONFIDES THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT CAUGHT THE GOJ BY SURPRISE AND THAT JAPANESE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT PROPOSAL. CONNOR DID NOT SAY WHETHER FEASIBILITY STUDY IS HIS PRIVATE IDEA OR PROPOSAL APPROVED BY CABINET FOR DISCUSSION DURING UP-COMING GOA-GOJ MINISTERIAL TALKS IN TOKYO, IN WHICH HE WILL PARTICIPATE. NO DETAILS ON SITE, COST, SIZE, CONSTRUCTION TIMETABLE OR OTHER FACTORS WERE GIVEN. IN OPTING FOR JAPANESE CENTRIFUGE TECHNOLOGY, CONNOR SEEMS TO HAVE REJECTED FUTURE AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN ASSOCIATION FOR CENTRIFUGE ENRICHMENT (REF A), WHICH GOA JOINED IN JUNE, OR FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE GRENCH GASEOUS DIFFUSION PROCESS (REF B). CONNOR HAS PREVIOUSLY CRITICIZED U.S. GASEOUS DIFFUSION TECHNOLOGY AS "OBSOLESCE". GREEN

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